

Testimony

HB 1183

House Human Services Committee

Monday, January 10, 2005; 2 p.m.

North Dakota Department of Health

Good afternoon, Chairman Price and members of the House Human Services Committee. My name is Kathleen Mangskau, and I am director of the Division of Tobacco Prevention and Control for the North Dakota Department of Health. I am here to provide testimony in support of House Bill 1183 if amended to include raising to 19 the age for possession, distribution and use of tobacco, as well as sale and purchase.

The Department of Health believes no one should use tobacco and supports efforts to reduce tobacco use. As written, House Bill 1183 doesn't prohibit 18-year-olds from smoking; it merely stops them from purchasing tobacco. Without the suggested amendment, this bill may not reduce tobacco use among youth.

According to the 2003 Youth Risk Behavior Survey, North Dakota's youth tobacco use rate is among the highest in the nation. Nearly one in three high school students (30.2%) in North Dakota are current smokers, compared to about one in five nationally (21.9%). Tobacco often is the first drug used by young people who later use alcohol, marijuana and other illegal drugs. Nearly all first-use of tobacco occurs before high school graduation. If adolescents are kept tobacco free, most will remain tobacco free for the rest of their lives.

It is estimated that about one-fifth of high school students in North Dakota reach age 18 before graduating. Increasing the legal age for sale, purchase, possession, distribution and use of tobacco products could help in dealing with enforcement issues related to smoking by high school students who are age 18. Students who can purchase legally are more likely to have cigarettes at school or in their cars and to purchase or provide them for other students. In some cases, depending upon school policy, 18-year-old students can go off school property and smoke legally. Raising the age to 19 and strictly enforcing the law would help take tobacco out of the hands of high school students and has the potential to reduce the number of youth smoking.

This concludes my testimony. I am happy to answer any questions the committee may have.